

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers October 16, 2003

Michigan NETS Traffic Safety Symposium

Nearly 70 people attended the first-ever Michigan NETS Traffic Safety Symposium October 6 hosted by Autoliv in Auburn Hills. Special guest speaker Robert Stempel, retired president of General Motors, covered the history of automotive safety. He is now President, Chairman of Energy Conversion Devices, Inc. The day-long program also covered: technology/occupant protection systems; risk assessment/cost of crashes; and training opportunities/employer resources. The seminar was highlighted by a rollover crash demonstration at the only indoor facility in North America capable of demonstrating this event. The test vehicle, which contained two test dummies, was traveling 35 mph when launched into a rollover crash. The effects were extremely violent and captivating. In addition to the valuable information presented during the seminar, the event also secured many new NETS members interested in promoting traffic safety in the workplace. All conference expenses were donated by the NETS Advisory Council, which sponsored this event. For more information contact Dan Vartanian, Michigan NETS Coordinator at vartanid@michigan.gov

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Arbitron Says More People Listening to Radio In-Car

A recent Arbitron study shows more drivers are listening to the radio today than in the past 5 years. The National In-Car Study, a nationwide look at commuters' in-car media activity, finds that radio is still the dominant medium for automotive travelers. **For the complete study, visit http://www.arbitron.com/home/incar_study.asp, for the Arbitron press release, visit <http://www.arbitron.com/newsroom/archive/article3.htm>, and for a link to the study presentation, visit <http://www.arbitron.com/downloads/InCarStudy2003.pdf>.**

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NHTSA Has New Rollover Test for Passenger Vehicles

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will begin a new dynamic rollover test program for passenger vehicles. The testing procedure will be used in rating vehicles on their likelihood of a rollover. A static stability factor rating procedure is already in use by NHTSA. Mandated by the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act of 2000, the new dynamic test will provide additional information to consumers. Vehicle ratings based on a combination of the two procedures for rating rollover risk will be released by NHTSA beginning with Model Year 2004 vehicles. **For more information, visit the NHTSA website at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2003&filename=pr44-03.html>.**

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FMCSA Tightens Hours of Service For Truck Drivers

The Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999 enabled the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Association (FMCSA) to tighten truck drivers' hours of service rules. Under the old rules, drivers were limited to 10 hours of driving 15 hour days excluding meals and breaks. Under the new rule, drivers are allowed 11 hours of driving within 14 hour days including meals and breaks. This new rule is effective January 2004. Since this ruling, safety groups have stated that there is still too much driving allowed and that the automatic data recording requirements were dropped in the final ruling. While fleets are worried about loss of productivity and added costs from hiring more drivers and obtaining more trucks.

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Weight Reductions in Some Vehicles Increased Risk of Fatal Crash Involvement

Weight reductions in passenger cars, lighter vans, pickup trucks, and SUVs increased the risk of fatal crash involvement, a study by NHTSA has concluded. The study of 1991-99 models also found that large four-door passenger cars and minivans had the lowest fatality rates of all vehicle types. The study, done on the recommendation of the National Academy of Sciences, found that modest (100-pound) weight reductions in heavier (3,850 to 5,000 lbs.) light trucks and vans (LTVs) had little net effect on crash fatalities, but modest weight reductions in the heaviest LTVs (greater than 5,000 lbs.) were associated with a reduction in fatalities in other vehicles. One hundred-pound weight reductions in lighter LTVs and most passenger cars significantly increased fatality risk. Large 4-door passenger cars had the lowest fatal crash rates followed closely by minivans. The highest fatal crash rate was observed in small 4-door cars, mid-sized SUVs and compact pickup trucks. **To view the NHTSA news release, visit**

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2003&filename=pr45-03.html>.

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New Law to Protect Privacy of Black Box in California

California has passed a new law meant to protect the privacy of vehicle black box data. California Assembly Bill 213 was introduced by Tim Leslie, a Republican assemblyman, who felt that the information gathered by vehicle data recorders should be protected like other kinds of private information, and be accessible only through a specified procedure, such as that required to obtain permission for telephone wire taps. The new law, which takes effect on July 1, 2004 requires automakers to disclose the existence of data recorders in the vehicle owner's manual and forbids access to the data without either a court order or the owner's permission, unless it is for a safety study in which the information cannot be traced back to the car owner. A special provision is made for service technicians who may access the data for the purpose of repair as long as they do not disclose that information.

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New NHTSA Brochure to Help Older Drivers Determine Their Driving Skill

NHTSA has created a four-color brochure designed to help older adults determine if physical and mental changes have affected their driving skills. The brochure provides tips about what senior citizens can do to remain safe drivers for as long as possible. **For more information, visit the NHTSA website at** <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/OlderAdultswebsite/index.html>.

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Anti-Lock Brakes Losing Support of Regulators and Some Automakers

Anti-lock braking systems on 80% of new vehicles sold last year, are losing the support of regulators and some automakers. The latest government and insurance industry data show ABS doesn't appear to be increasing the number of crash deaths, a concern five years ago. But the research also doesn't show any overall lifesaving benefits from the devices. Many safety experts who have seen ABS' skid-reducing benefits on test tracks — or benefited from the systems personally — still swear by it. But the lack of proof that it saves lives is influencing regulators. NHTSA, citing the latest research, opposed an ABS-based option for new tire pressure warning systems but offered it as an alternative. The regulation, which would have given automakers an option of installing the warning systems through monitors on ABS or through monitors on each tire, was overturned in court last month. NHTSA is working on a new regulation.

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Drowsy Driving Took a Front Seat in the News Recently

Drowsy driving took front seat in the news the week of September 23. CNN, MSNBC, WebMD and the Los Angeles Times, are just a few of the media outlets that covered Maggie's Law, the New Jersey

statute that is the first in the nation to outlaw drowsy driving. Nearly 2 million America Online users responded to a recent online poll about the issue. Their answers to the question "How often do you feel drowsy when driving?" found about one-half of America's adult drivers - 51 percent or approximately 100 million people - are on the roads feeling sleepy while they are driving. **To view "Maggie's Law," visit http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2002/Bills/A1500/1347_R2.HTM. To read the full Associated Press article, visit <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/09/30/drowsy.drivers.ap/index.html>.**

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President Bush Signs Legislation Extend Federal Highway Programs Funding

President Bush signed into law legislation that extends federal highway programs and related agencies funding for at least the next 5 months. This legislation prevented federal highway programs from shutting down October 1st by continuing the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century. Next year, Congress will continue its efforts to reach agreement on a six-year reauthorization of the federal highway program.

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Canadian Transport Minister Outlined Possible Strategies to Reduce Driver Distraction

Canadian Transport Minister David Collenette released a "discussion document" in June that outlined possible strategies to reduce driver distraction from in-vehicle communication technologies, also known as telematics. This document cited not only cell phones, but navigational systems and Internet access as problematic. A 2002 study by Transportation Canada's ergonomics division revealed that "while the introduction of hands-free operation for telematics devices is intended to reduce or eliminate the distraction due to manual operation of these units, a significant portion of the distraction associated with their use may arise not from the manual manipulation of these devices but rather the cognitive consequences of their use."

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UK-Based Foundation Calling on Highway Authorities to Improve Road Safety During Winter Months

The U.K.-based RAC Foundation is calling on local highway authorities to improve road safety during the coming winter months. It is calling for lighting to be well-maintained, road signs to be clean and not overgrown, and lines on the road to be clean and in a good state of repair. This is so they are clearly visible day or night, in all weather conditions. An RAC Foundation spokesman said: "Without regular maintenance, signs and lines deteriorate, becoming difficult and sometimes impossible to see, especially in the sort of dark, wet weather we can expect during the next six months."

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Traffic Safety News for our Families...

Study of New Line of Air Bags Designed to Reduce Injuries to Children

According to an article in the Detroit News on September 30, a new line of air bags designed to reduce injuries to children are effective in passenger cars and minivans, but don't lower the risk to kids riding in sport utility vehicles. Compared with vehicles with the old air bags, children exposed to the so-called "second generation" air bags were half as likely to sustain a serious injury when they were riding in cars and minivans. But they were just as likely to be injured in SUVs when the new air bags deployed, according to data compiled by Partners for Child Passenger Safety, a group of researchers based at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The study examined State Farm Insurance claims involving 430,308 children ages 3-15 riding in 288,187 vehicles that crashed between Dec. 1, 1998, and Nov. 30, 2002. Of those, 47,923 had first-generation air bags that deployed and 60,069 had second-generation air bags that deployed.

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Review of Driving Behavior of Novice, First Year Drivers

The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute has released a literature review examining driving behavior and accident involvement of novice drivers during their first years with a license, the methods and incentives used to influence young drivers' attitudes and behavior, the impact of high school driver education on young novice drivers' safety, and the impact of different licensing systems on young novice drivers' safety. **For a copy of the review, visit <http://www.vti.se/PDF/reports/R491A.pdf>.**

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NTSB to Examine State of Driver Education Programs

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) will examine the state of driver education and training programs in a public forum on October 28 - 29 in Washington, D.C. The forum will explore the strengths and weaknesses of driver education programs and what can be done to improve them. NTSB began looking into driver education programs as a result of a January 2003 crash in Montana where three young people and their instructor were killed when the 14-year old student driver lost control of the vehicle and swerved into oncoming traffic. **Information about the forum and the agenda are available on the Board's website, <http://www.nts.gov/events/symposia.htm>.**

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